REBELS AND AGRARIANS ALL: STUDIES IN ONE-PARTY POLITICS

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IN A RECENT appearance before the Student Political Union of a Southern university, Ambassador Trovanosky of the Soviet Union graciously submitted to questions from the floor. "Your Excellency," inquired the Professor of Politics, Virginia bred and a true Jeffersonian: "How can the Soviet Union be a truly democratic state when there exists only one political party?" "You, I understand," replied the Ambassador, with imperturbable good humor, "have something of the same situation in the South." Whether fascist, democratic, or now implied communist on the Ambassador's good authority, what an avalanche of clichés and recriminations that phrase, *one-party politics,* unlimbers.

"And politics the damndest
In old Kentucky."

If the Ambassador would imply that all clashes of class and interest are smothered in solid South politics, history would pronounce him wrong. Yet none can claim that these clashes have yet resolved the great issues that plague the South. One may, as Vann Woodward would have us do, recognize the term "Southern demagogue" for what it is, a political epithet. One may try to reduce the internal politics of a great region to its basic conflicts: the old order and the new, lower classes against upper, agrarians against industrialists, autonomy against outside controls, tenants against landlords, farmers against commercial interests only to find that every in-

telligible pattern seems to dissolve in the universal reagents of race conflict and the one-party system. With the example of Woodward's masterly book before us, one feels again that even the most resolute of advocates have slowly changed their color or, like Tom Watson, have been whipped home whimpering, finally to wave the bloody shirt of race and religious prejudice.

To some then the transition from the politics of the Old South is a story that progressively loses in dignity as it gains in the social conflicts of "a too numerous democracy." This theme is traced in David Duncan Wallace's vivid *History of South Carolina,* that epitome of a section, where it leads from Calhoun to Tillman to Coley Blease; it is told in the biography of Tom Watson where Woodward shows it to lead from the ante-bellum triumvirate of Bob Toombs, Howell Cobb, and Alex Stephens through the post-bellum triumvirate of Joe Brown, A. H. Colquitt, and General John B. Gordon to the tragedy that was Tom Watson.[1]

I

In the ante-bellum period the South at long last had come to march all one way. South Carolina serves as epitome of that transition from the politics of aristocracy to the politics of demos, all the more because of the brilliant characterizations of two of her sons and historians, David Duncan Wallace and Francis Butler Simkins.[2]

South Carolina, says Wallace, has gone through three stages—from British Province to Aristocratic Republic to Modern Democracy. In the early period, he feels, were sown the seeds of all the ills that later rose to plague the state. South Carolina enslaved the African as a means of immediate wealth to a ruling class and of permanent calamity to the state. "If we," writes Wallace for the South as well as his state, "could remake those irretrievable beginnings we could revoke our destiny." In its middle period the state dominated the nation, partly by chance of brilliant statesmen, but mainly because she had gone furthest in exploiting the benefits and incurring the perils of slavery. The strength of ante-bellum Carolina was not in the strength of its position; it lay rather in the enforced unity

[1]David Duncan Wallace, *History of South Carolina.* New York, 1936. 3 volumes. *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel.* New York: The Macmillan Company. $3.75.
[2]F. B. Simkins, *The Tillman Movement in South Carolina* is the standard work on this subject.

of its people. A disciplined army with banners, writes Wallace, is magnificent though it be marching into the Red Sea.

South Carolina had long been ruled by a closely knit aristocracy. Here the possession of land and slaves had been concentrated in the hands of a few who took their call to the kingdom as a matter of course. Where the elite led, the rank and file, before the War, had been content to follow. So much, writes Wallace, did J. H. Hammond, haughty son of a poor Massachusetts school teacher, enjoy his position as the husband of a wealthy South Carolina heiress that he wrote in 1848: "Planting in this country is the only independent and really honorable profession. The planters here are essentially what the nobility are in other countries."

In the Constitution of 1790 membership in the legislature had been restricted to owners of 500 acres and ten slaves or of real estate to the value of £500. "If demagogues were born in South Carolina under the Constitution of 1790," writes William Watts Ball, "it was into an atmosphere that froze them before they grew up." After 1808 the suffrage was extended to the white masses, but they remained so ignorant and so far outside the currents of politics and society that they never exercised the ballot for their own interests. For forty years the planter's great protagonist, John C. Calhoun, so dominated Carolina politics that the folk saying ran: "When Calhoun takes snuff, the state sneezes." And there arose no Carolinians to doubt that the welfare of the white masses coincided with the welfare of the class Calhoun so ably represented.

The ideal before 1860, as Duncan Wallace points out, was that those holding the preponderant economic interest should carry on the state government in harmony with the interest of their class with honesty and simplicity. The best citizens should administer local affairs while the ablest of their class should defend the state's peculiar institutions in Washington. Of the sixty-three different South Carolinians who held the offices of governor and United States Senator between 1778 and 1865, Simkins has calculated that only two were of humble birth, and only five belonged to the more lowly Methodist or Baptist churches. The great officeholding families were interrelated, eight families appearing more than once. A Mrs. Elizabeth Pyre Manning was intimately related to six governors of the

state; the niece of one, wife of another, sister of another, aunt of another, mother of one and grandmother of yet another.

Ability, it was felt, remained concentrated among the few, though there was no disposition to exclude the ablest of the newcomers provided they belonged to the correct professions and accepted the ideals of the ruling class. W H. Trescot has described the ante-bellum legislature in terms that remind one of the English House of Lords. Session after session, he says in effect, the same men, the natural leaders of the state who represented broad acres and thousands of slaves, were returned to the legislature. "And as the years went by the boys from the College who had filled the galleries, and to whom the debates were as much a part of their education as their recitations, came down to fill the seats in the House, and to renew and perpetuate hereditary friendships."

The contrast between the heights and the depths in this society was profound. No one can doubt the masses of ignorance and poverty that dwelt beside the roads along which the aristocracy drove. "The wild Irish," Olmstead wrote of South Carolina's white masses, "do not differ more from the English gentry than do these rustics from the better class of towns people." Olmstead may have been an unfriendly critic but it was William Gregg, distinguished son of South Carolina, who wrote: "The larger portion of our poorer classes are suffered to while away their existence in a state but one step removed from the Indians of the forest." A writer in the *Constitutional Union* of Georgia of December 6, 1850, considered South Carolina the most aristocratic state in the Union with less intercourse between rulers and ruled and less sympathy between rich and poor than any other commonwealth. Here are portents of the fury that Tillman was to arouse. And later Duncan Wallace was to write that the word *aristocrat* had come to carry in South Carolina a connotation that it never had in England—a man who neglects and despises the people.

In its brilliant period of aristocratic rule the state played a part on the national stage far out of proportion to its wealth and population. This middle period, Wallace points out, was separated from the others by two great wars of revolution, the first elevating the state to power and eminence, the other devastating her institutions and leaving her nationally in-

significant. Begun in war, consummated in Reconstruction, this revolution was completed when Ben Tillman ushered in the new Democracy.

On the tenth day of August, 1885, an uncouth farmer in a voice that rasped through the sultry courthouse read a speech to some five hundred farmers gathered at Bennettsville, South Carolina. That speech marked the beginning of the end of the proudest and poorest aristocracy then extant in America. In five years the obscure farmer, Benjamin Ryan Tillman, was Governor of South Carolina and political dictator of his state. There was nothing in the scene at Bennettsville to presage a social revolution. His farmer neighbors had selected Tillman one of the delegates to attend a meeting of the State Agricultural Society and for no reason except the courtesy due a worker in the cause, President Duncan of the Society had invited Farmer Ben to deliver an address.

Wasting no words on the courtesies appropriate to the occasion, Tillman rudely challenged the complacent pictures drawn by speakers preceding. Agriculture in South Carolina was on the decline; half of the crops were mortgaged before they were grown. His words were virile and caustic . "The yoke of the credit system that used to gall no longer frets. The decay of that sturdy independence of character which once was so marked in our people is rapid, and the lazy 'descent into hell' is facilitated by the State government, which has encouraged this reliance on others. . The people are being hoodwinked by demagogues and lawyers in the pay of finance."

After paying his respects in scathing terms to time-serving politicians posing as the farmers' friends and to the lack of practical agricultural training at the State College, Tillman suggested a program of agricultural reform in six resolutions. At each home thrust the farmers in the audience applauded vigorously, but the accredited delegates coolly voted down all but a minor resolution advocating an agricultural experiment station.

Open letters and speeches from the new found leader followed. When the Senate refused the farmers' demands for reform of the Agricultural Department Tillman lashed out: "If the farmers have any self-respect; if they have any manhood; if they are not the dogs they are taken for, they will see to it that these men are properly rewarded. If we cannot reorganize the Agricultural Department, we can reorganize the Senate." To the

advice that farmers stay out of politics Tillman replied with withering scorn: "Say, you men who own the soil of South Carolina, . . . how do you like this wet nursing, this patronizing, this assumption of superiority, this insufferable insolence?" Up and down the country his voice was heard: "The farmers have acted like cowards and idiots in the past; whether or not they are going to run the state in the future is for them to say." And when at last the conservatives thought they had scotched the agricultural college and Tillman with it, Calhoun's son-in-law, Thomas G. Clemson, reopened the whole issue with the bequest of the Calhoun estate for the founding of a State College of Agriculture.

Many who knew Farmer Ben were surprised at his sudden development of the power of leadership. First to appear was his talent for rough and ready campaigning, a combination of hard sense and sustained invective that left his more polished opponents helpless. Many a South Carolinian now living can remember Tillman as he rode to the county fairs and courthouse days in the later 'eighties, a sallow-faced, shaggy-haired man with one gleaming, restless, angry eye. They still hear, perchance, echoes of his strident voice at the hustings as he screamed his speeches of defiance, raucous, immoderate, denouncing all gentlemen, all government by gentlemen, demanding that government be restored to the plain people.

Shorn of much of their economic power after abolition, the upper class nevertheless had proceeded to conduct politics as though nothing had happened in South Carolina. Once it was assumed that only Charlestonians, low-country rice planters, and their like possessed the leisure, the ability, and the inclination for office. Then they ruled as a matter of *noblesse oblige* and at the cost of time and attention stolen from their beautiful estates. Now, fallen on reconstruction poverty, the stipends of office came to mean ofttimes the sole support of a famous name, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Once good livers, they had learned to economize, and, men of honor that they were, they burdened the state not a sou beyond their salaries. Not a sheet of paper, writes William Watts Ball, was available for deadheads in the county court offices.

Best governed is least governed was the one principle of Jefferson's they accepted. When they translated it best taxed is least taxed, they spread the social services thin, and saved their class much monies in so

doing. True, they rescued South Carolina from the spending orgy of the Reconstruction government and for a long time the state had no spare cash to spend. Tillman was always inclined to truth telling; and but a few years after his angry charges of "incipient corruption," he was telling the United States Senate: "This aristocracy be it said to its credit, gave the State as good government so far as purity and honesty is concerned as any country ever had. But a prouder, more arrogant, or hot-headed ruling class never existed."

Once Tillman threw off the grip of the convention system, the links that bound the county courthouse rings to the polished leaders residing in Charleston and Columbia were broken. Within ten years after the restoration of home rule, an unknown farmer led a flaming revolt of the white yeomanry, scaled the battlements of the state, and pitched the idols of the aristocracy over the ramparts. The revolution of 1890 completed the revolution of 1865.

The people came to Tillman's inauguration as they had to Andrew Jackson's. Always on a high plane in his written addresses, Tillman in an able inaugural reassured his supporters and impressed his opponents. His opening sentences showed full realization of the significance of the occasion:

> The citizens of this great commonwealth have, for the first time in its history, demanded and obtained for themselves the right to choose their Governor, and I, as leader and exponent of the revolution which has brought about this change, am here to enter upon the discharge of its onerous duties. With such an audience as this, I might if I were an orator, attempt to win your sympathy by flights of what some call eloquence, but which sensible people consider "glittering generalities," the tinsel and brass buttons of a dress parade, meaning nothing and worth nothing. . The responsibilities of my position demand practical statesmanship. We are here to do business; not evolve beautiful theories or discuss ideal government. We come as reformers, claiming that many things in the government are wrong.

Radical and intemperate of speech in the heat of campaign Tillman proved sane and practical in administration. With the legislature he adopted

he dictatorial tone that came natural to him. In the main the legislature was ready to follow, and the achievements of his two terms went far to redeem his campaign pledges.

After Tillman's second term the conservatives disintegrated. They had nothing to offer that the state would have. Tillman won an easy election to the U. S. Senate where he was able to say without exaggeration: "I represent the state and I represent it so thoroughly that I claim to give it voice."

Tillman's work in South Carolina was done. Hereafter until his death in 1918, he belonged on the national stage. Handicapped in the beginning by the reputation of "Pitchfork Ben," professional Southerner and Negro baiter, he gradually won the respect of his colleagues. Aggressive, virile, able, ever ready to challenge corruption or to tell the frank truth about an ignored situation, Tillman was a breath of fresh air in the Senate. He even made friends with those solid aristocrats, the New England senators. Unable to account for Tillman's admirable familiarity with the classics, capitol reporters concluded that New England senators had taken his education in hand. Anyone who had heard him quote *Tristam Shandy* to the rustics of South Carolina could have told them better. Picturesque, statesmanlike, Carolina's greatest national figure since Calhoun, Tillman of the Senate, as he grew older, became the defender of things as they are. The sting, says Phillips Russell, died from his harsh personality and when he roared at all he roared but gently.

Contemporary, intelligent South Carolina thought that Tillman went too far, much too far. Intelligent opinion today may wonder whether Tillman went far enough. He claimed that the towns and the commercial interests tended to take all and give nothing back to the county. He saw that trade, credit, and the services skimmed the cream from agriculture. Tillmanism was the spread of the modern democratic movement to the Deep South, but political democracy was not enough to solve the fundamental inequalities of an agrarian society. Tillman made known to South Carolina that a new class of men had arisen, wanting power and security. "These men," says Phillips Russell in a fitting figure, "he led within sight of the promised land and there he left them. But he could not have carried them further. As if realizing this they stood around uncertainly in the glare of the light for a moment, while a new stratum of politicians filtered through

them and occupied the places of power. And then they went back to their farming."

True to our English liberal traditions this democratic movement was limited to the field of politics. It knew no way to reach economic realities. Moreover Tillmanism, true to the South, was democracy with exclusions. No one denied it excluded the Negro, but what of the submerged white classes? The farm tenant and the cotton mill worker yelled for Tillman at the hustings and voted for him solidly. But Tillman made them no promises and for them he had no program. He had spoken of an "ignorant and shiftless tenantry directed—or rather overlooked by ignorant and lazy landlords." In his first inaugural the frank Tillman said: "We deny without regard to color, that all men are created equal. It is not true now and it was not true when Jefferson said it."

Salty tory though Woodward calls him, William Watts Ball has put his finger on Tillman's weakness.

> Probably it never occurred to Tillman that the farmers whom he infuriated were composed of distinct and not easily reconciled interests, the landowners, and the tenants. He fused them and from the absence of anything that ever he said that would have lifted up working men whose sole possessions were their hard hands, it is to be inferred that his own confusion was as great as theirs.

Tillman's realistic thinking was rarely vitiated by nostalgic yearnings for the ante-bellum South. The attitudes of the representatives of the old order were sufficient to curb Ben's latent tendencies toward romanticism. "The old aristocrats," wrote Ray Stannard Baker in a contemporary account, "gibe at the new leaders, hate them bitterly, see the blunders of untrained administrators, have their pride rubbed raw by their crudities." In their own way aristocrats could be crude. As Governor Tillman passed along the streets of Columbia prominent citizens ostentatiously avoided him. Their wives dropped the time-honored custom of calling upon the governor's wife. "I meet scowling faces when I walk upon Main Street," said Tillman to a friend in 1892. When, says Wallace, the governor in an address remarkable for its appreciation of Carolina's past, accepted the monument over General Marion's grave, none of the Santee aristocracy at-

tended. When Tillman's successor, Governor J. G. Evans, delayed in disciplining Charleston for its defiance of the dispensary authorities, the Columbia *State* sneered that "possibly it was due to the social recognition given him by the *News and Courier* set." Here, writes Wallace, are the assumptions of a self-centered aristocracy that the son of a Confederation Brigadier, graduate of a Northern university, and Governor of his State would give his soul for social recognition at their hands.

The poor, the ignorant, and the harassed were disappointed at the outcome of the Tillman movement and awaited a new agitator. As Tillmanism ran to seed, prejudice increased with no clarification of the issues. Cole Blease early emerged as an advocate of the movement's darker phases. Moreover, he represented elements that the Reform Movement had not taken into account. Townbred with popularity garnered from the friendships formed around his father's hotel and livery stable, Blease was no agrarian. College graduate and adroit criminal lawyer, he liked to represent himself as of an origin more lowly than his middle class background justified.

Blease's original contribution is found in his ability to make a class appeal without offering a class program. He came to hold the cotton mill, the tenant farmer, the "poor white" vote in the hollow of his hand and yet he advocated no social legislation to benefit the classes to which he appealed. To this statement there is one exception. Blease, early in his career, supported the first bill limiting hours of labor in cotton mills. In Negro baiting Blease added nothing new.

Blease appealed to the masses while he opposed practically every program that might have operated for their betterment. The masses advocated no legislation; they possibly did not know that legislation could help their case. They did know that they wanted to be treated with respect. Governor Blease, says Wallace, associated with the masses and gave them what they wanted—recognition and equality. If it was class antagonism, it was the most ignorant class consciousness yet developed in our country. Not a single act favoring labor, farm tenants, or the masses bears Blease's name. He, in fact, opposed many social welfare measures in the hustings and drew the cheers of the men such measures might have served. Men who paid no taxes, writes Wallace, cheered when he denounced high taxes.

He opposed health programs for the schools and offered to telegraph a pardon to any father who shot a doctor for violating his daughter's modesty in a health examination. He opposed compulsory education with clever appeals to agrarian individualism, the omnipotence of parents, and the inherent foolishness of all school teachers. Job holders, he gave fair warning, had better find other subjects for public discourse than the state's illiteracy.

He opposed factory inspection laws with the declaration that he would veto any laws for imposing conditions of labor on adults who were free to work where they pleased. When this aroused the anger of organized labor, he replied he knew more about factories than walking delegates and Yankee agitators. Any one mistreated must see him in person and as Governor he would right their wrongs. Organized labor, says Wallace, could not see why 10,000 free operators should not have protection against unsanitary working conditions equal to that offered a few score convicts, working under state supervision. Blease opposed affiliation with A. F. of L. unions, advocating local unions not run by Yankees and outsiders. Further regulation of child and adult labor he also opposed. These were welcome tidings to many mill executives. And certain cool men of business, writes Wallace, despising his methods yet supported Blease as good policy.

II

It is a crowded stage, this Georgia of the New South, on which Vann Woodward parts the curtain. The plot is confused, the dialogue is hurried, and some of the action takes place in the shadows or the wings. Actors appear to play dual rôles and the characterization is difficult to follow. Patrician and plebian, Old South and New, planter oligarch and tribune of the people, developer of railroads and protector of orphans, reconciler of sections and apologist of the new rich, farmer's friend and tenants' enemy, apostle of civil liberties and persecutor of Jews, Negroes, and Catholics: these are some of the divided personalities to be found within the covering of this book.

Georgia, one gathers, was not so troubled by questions of aristocracy. More serious matters prevailed, for the state was the battleground of an invading industrialism. In the boom years after Reconstruction when

Northern capital was flowing Southward, the dominant figures of Georgia were business men in politics. Neither the planting aristocracy nor the small farmer had risen to power after ousting the corrupt Bulloch regime. From 1872 to 1890 the "Bourbon Triumvirate," capitalists on the make, passed the highest offices back and forth among themselves. Here was Joe E. Brown, poor white from North Georgia who rose to be the state's war governor and a millionaire industrialist interested in coal, iron, railroads, and convict leases. In politics he played a rôle so changing that the people of his state still question his motives. "He was," writes Mildred Thompson, "first in secession, first in reconstruction, and very nearly first in the restoration of Democratic home rule. He came up on top at every revolution of the wheel of destiny." Allied with him were General John B. Gordon, the state's greatest soldier created by the war, promoter of multiplied schemes for sudden riches, and Alfred H. Colquitt, one representative of the old aristocracy who had found planting profitable after the war but had not neglected investments in railroads.

Untroubled by questions of patrician versus plebian, here was an alliance of politics and industry that was to make the New South. It needed only a prophet. In the thick of Atlanta's traffic, solid and strong, and dirty with the smoke of industry, stands a statue of Henry W. Grady. He was the prophet. He had, says W. E. B. Du Bois, Irish wit, Southern fire, and the flowers of oratory. In three years, says Du Bois, he spoke three pregnant sentences. In New York in 1886 he said, "There was a South of slavery and secession. That South is dead." In Augusta in 1887, he said, "Every dollar of Northern money invested in the South gives us a new friend in that section." Finally he said frankly in Boston in 1889, "When will the black man cast a free ballot? When the Northern laborer casts a vote uninfluenced by his employer." Here was the invitation to the North to invest for profits, to the South to make those profits possible. The means to those profits, it is to be feared, were to be found in the cheap labor of white men and black.

Of the ante-bellum triumvirate, Alexander H. Stephens, son of the plain people, Vice-president of the Confederacy, and Robert Toombs, aristocrat and its Secretary of State, survived to see the farmers' interests swallowed up in the New Departure. Stephens, "an immense cloak, a high

hat and peering out of the middle a thin, pale, sad face," was defeated for the Senate by Gordon, went to the House for a decade, and died in the governor's chair. Together Brown, Stephens, and Toombs had, in the troubled day of the Confederacy, practiced state's rights against Jefferson Davis. Less inflexible than Toombs, Stephens was a participant in the lease of a railroad from the state. When Toombs pointed out the dubious character of his colleagues, and the questionable proceedings, Stephens transferred his stock to the state.

Real agrarian was Toombs, unregenerate, unreconstructed, his bearing imperial, his "iron grey hair abundant, disordered like the mane of a lion." In the later phase of his career he was a tribune of the people, opposing at the bar and on the rostrum, says Ulrich Phillips, the plundering of the carpet bag government and the rapacity of the corporations. Deprived of United States citizenship because of his refusal to take the oath of allegiance, he helped to reform and modernize the constitution at the Convention of 1877. He helped set up provisions for the state control of corporations and he guided the 1879 legislation creating a commission to regulate railroad rates. Informed that it was a serious thing to shake the pillars of property, the old man roared: "Better shake the pillars of property than the pillars of liberty." Stephens became the compromise governor of the New Departure, but the General, who had never invested a cent of his fortune in railroads, remained unconvinced to the last. Told on his deathbed that the business-dominated legislature was still in session, the General muttered, "Lord, send for Cromwell!"

Here, Woodward makes clear, were the influences that marked Tom Watson. Grandson of a planter who owned an estate valued at $55,000, Tom grew up in poverty to achieve success as a criminal lawyer. He taught a country school, played the fiddle, wrote verse, spouted Byron, studied law, and came to be considered a born orator among the country people. He has said, "Eating at their tables, sitting at their firesides, sleeping in their beds, I gained a knowledge of these people which no books could have given me. They have always been good to me—these plain country people—and I love them."

With tortuous variations Watson was to play the rôle of agrarian rebel to the bitter, tragic end. In 1882 he served a term on the state legis-

lature, held his insurgent attitude, and retired in disgust. Becoming more doubtful of the New South's alliance with Northern capital, he came to suspect Grady's message and to believe that the agrarian West was the South's natural ally. In Atlanta he said: "If the devil himself were to come to this town in a palace car and propose to haul the balance of the state to his infernal kingdom, and allow Atlanta capitalists the profits on the transaction, they would cry: Hurrah for the devil. He's going to build up Atlanta!"

The Farmers' Alliance grew by leaps and bounds and in 1890 Watson easily won an election to Congress, where he supported advanced labor legislation, introduced the first R. F. D. bill, joined the Populists, and was widely heralded as the incarnation of agrarian revolt. By 1892 the conciliatory and appealing Grady was dead; but the more practical Democratic machine was now ready for Watson. His district was gerrymandered, and in a bloody and fraudulent election Watson lost to a regular candidate. A congressional investigation applied the customary whitewash, and in 1894 after renewed attacks on trusts, high finance, and machine politics, Watson lost an even more bloody election. In 1896, nominated by the Populists for Vice-president on a fusion ticket with Bryan, he was contemptuously treated by the Democrats, who hoped to secure Populist votes without recognizing Populist leaders.

Armed for battle in behalf of his farmers, Watson found no place in the rank of the business-dominated Bourbon Democrats. Raising the banner of the Alliance and the Populists, he fought violently, recklessly, only to meet the most shameful treatment. Beaten, humiliated, well nigh driven insane, he retired to brood and to write. Of these times he has said: "Politically, I was ruined. Financially, I was flat on my back. How near I came to loss of mind only the God who made me knows—but I was as near distraction, perhaps, as any man could safely be."

Those eight years from 1896 to 1904 did something to Watson that no biographer can explain. Twice he emerged from his silence to denounce the Spanish-American War and to speak for a child-labor amendment. By the practice of law and historical writing, he recouped his shattered estate. He turned out lives of Napoleon, Jefferson, and Jackson, and a history of France that read well, sold well, and flamed with revolutionary doctrine.

He built a white pillared Southern mansion and finally rose to be worth some $258,000, the landlord of forty-four tenants. Whether or not the corrosive acid of money-getting entered his soul, his old traits of irascibility and vindictiveness began to grow upon him. He made the last races for the Populists as their candidate for President and even in 1904 his message troubled the old Populists.

Still outside the fold, Watson returned to state politics to dominate the Democratic Party, the Warwick of Georgia. From his defense of the Negro's constitutional rights in the Populist campaigns, he turned to advocate the elimination by law of the Negro from politics. The machine used the Negro to beat us, he said, but with him eliminated they will find the majority of whites against them. "Let us accept the invitation to come home. Let us take over the Democratic Party," wrote a prominent Populist to Watson. And in an accurate prophecy, the *Constitution* wrote: "The spectacle of Tom Watson controlling the machinery of the Democratic party—and at the same time remaining an open and avowed Populist—is one which the Democrats of this state may have to endure."

His contribution and his limitations are shown in the part Watson played in the Hoke Smith-Joe Brown campaigns from 1906 to 1910. Since 1898 a succession of conservative governors had ruled the state. In the 1906 contest for governor, both Clark Howell, conservative editor of the *Constitution,* and Hoke Smith, Cleveland's Secretary of the Interior, and anti-corporation lawyer, sought Watson's assistance. Gold Democrat though he had been, Smith wrote a radical platform providing for more direct popular government, corrupt-practices acts, the outlawing of lobbying, and stringent regulation of railroads and corporations. When he came out for disfranchisement of the Negro, Watson finally joined hands with his old enemy. "Hoke Smith is trying to do what we want done and can't do ourselves," he announced to his old guard. Smith was elected by a large majority and proceeded to the enactment of much of his program. "He has done what most of our trust-busting governors have merely been talking about," wrote Herbert Quick.

Throughout the course of the most progressive administration since the Populists were smashed, Smith bent every effort to conciliate the "Sage of Hickory Hill." The break finally came when the governor refused to

pardon a convicted homicide at Watson's command. Becoming convinced that Smith's proposed reform of Georgia's "rotten boroughs," the county unit system, was aimed at his hold on the country vote, Watson shifted support to Joseph M. Brown. Here was reversal indeed. Son of Georgia's great developer, "Little Joe" Brown had spent twenty-five years since college in the service of railroads and corporations. As a member of the state railroad commission he had helped block so many of Smith's reforms that finally the governor ousted him in mid-term. Brown was made a "martyr" in a "campaign of vindication," but Watson played a sorrier rôle. Unable to give reasons, he resorted to slander and abuse. Brown was elected by a slender majority in 1908, the same year that Watson accepted his last commission as Populist nominee for President. Watson's awkward position stood revealed when his Atlanta speech of acceptance, breathing defiance of capitalist industrialism was followed the next day by Brown's speech in the same city accepting the nomination for governor with a proper denunciation of "crusades against capital" and "wars on legitimate investment." Two years later Hoke Smith returned to defeat Brown, carry further his reforms, and go on to the United States Senate.

Watson now seemed a lost soul. The bitterness that had been dealt to him, he dealt out doubly distilled. Now he became convinced that the educational restriction on the franchise was wrong because it stimulated Negroes to learn to read. To this campaign Watson's publications now added anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, anti-Coca Cola, anti-foreign missionary agitation. When the notorious Frank case came along, Watson drove home the sexual-racial theme with an untiring insistence that would do credit to the high command of Nazi propaganda. For all he ever said to the contrary, the final lynching of Frank left no shadow on Watson's troubled soul. Quite frankly state newspapers came to write of him as the "basest, most depraved, most poisonous man in Georgia."

Through it all, an irreducible corporal's guard clung to their idol, and Tom continued to make and unmake the governors of Georgia. Yet there were flashes of his old self. Whether through idealism or spleen, he denounced intervention in the World War as "ravenous commercialism" and continued his fight against "universal goose stepping" until his papers were forbidden the mails and he was threatened with Leavenworth. Di-

vested of his papers, and his hold on the public, Tom Watson was regarded as dead.

And then the bitter old warrior made one final lunge from the grave. In the welter of post-War pessimism, he made the race against his old enemy Hoke Smith, for Hoke's seat in the Senate. Campaigning for the defeat of the League and the restoration of civil rights, Watson boldly took on the rising American Legion which had set out to make him an example for all "slackerdom." Watson was elected by a decisive majority and with him his candidate for governor, Tom Hardwick, reconciled with Watson after ten years of enmity.

The rest was anti-climax. His return to Washington after thirty years was the emergence of a Populist hermit among the sleek creatures of normalcy. In the Senate he expressed sympathy for the new Russia, organized labor, oppressed minorities, and the victims of A. Mitchell Palmer. He introduced a resolution requesting pardon for one, citizen Blodgett of Iowa, then serving a ten-year sentence for printing excerpts from one of Watson's own speeches. "Should I be in the Senate and he in the penitentiary? He said no more in Iowa than I have said here, and I think I am in somewhat better company than he. That is only an opinion of mine."

But the piping times of Harding were too peaceful, Watson too irascible, and death too near. Without having changed his opinion of the world and without having done anything to make the world change its long-held opinion of him, Watson died September 26, 1922.

III

The lessons drawn from these studies in one-party politics will prove as varied, I fear, as the politics of the reader. Tom Watson the younger has been forgotten by many to whom Tom Watson the older came to stand for all those ugly prejudices that rise to plague our public life. Between the two, Watson, the symbol of the tragedy of a section, could almost stand for all things to all men. Accordingly I should not be surprised to learn that *Tom Watson* is the best seller in Atlanta or that in the same mail Mr. Woodward had received a letter of congratulation from the Historian General of the U. D. C. and an endorsement from the Communists' Book of

the Month Club. The three would have one point of agreement: *Tom Watson* is a superbly written book.

I should long hesitate to give a diagnosis on the two clinical cases that have passed in review. If pressed I should like to cite a practitioner of political science in England and a distinguished son of South Carolina. The history of modern democracies, says Harold Laski, is a frantic search by governments to repair the holes cut in the social dykes by the owners of economic power. It is significant then, he points out, that no great statesman has been a business man, for the reason that public opinion has never been able to accept the capitalist's claim to be a trustee of the public interest. Usually it has seen him for what he is, a specialist in money making.

And then I should quote in part a historic editorial that William Watts Ball, honest conservative that he is, wrote at the close of Blease's latest campaign. And I should hasten to add that Editor Ball's pungent words apply to more states than South Carolina.

> In general, the politics of South Carolina is *scarabaeoid* in its nature. This one-party state with its "Democratic" primary system is controlled by razor-back lawyers. They pull the strings of the courthouse rings. They run the legislature, elect the judiciary, and more and more the judges "play ball" with them. Long ago the corporation lawyers gave up fighting them in the open. Corporation interests are protected by methods not so offensive to the public gaze as are those of pettifoggers and yet not essentially more praiseworthy. . . .
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> The average industrialist and larger financier of South Carolina is much like those of other states. . . His soul is absorbed in the solution of problems in the first four rules of arithmetic as applied to his profits and losses. He wants officeholders who will help him solve them and is no more concerned about problems of other South Carolinians than he is about those of the Senegambians. Mark, he is typical of his kind in America and quite impenetrable to the notion that for the deep discontent, the "radicalism" of the people, and for the wild and woozy vagaries of the New Deal, his shortsightedness and stupidity are in great part responsible.
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> One had heard in the campaign now drawing to a conclusion much talk about "radicalism" and "Communism." There was not a shadow

of foundation for it. The misfortune of South Carolina is that none of its leaders, political or industrial, know the definition of "Communism," "Marxianism," "radicalism," "Bolshevism." As another has said, they mean "what doesn't agree with them." They would with equal accuracy apply the epithet "Communism" to a stomach upsetting dish of cucumbers as to a politician. Neither agrees with them.

We could almost wish that a few radicals, highminded men who can think, men like Norman Thomas and Oswald Garrison Villard, might arise and speak in South Carolina. Some of them might be lynched. Some of us might be lynched for neglecting to halloo for the lynchers. Their coming and speaking might dispel some of the hypocrisy, much of the vulgarity, and a little of the dreadful fog that has not lifted in these many years. . . .

The *News and Courier* opposed the late Captain Tillman relentlessly and does not repent it. We think nearly all his policies were hurtful to the State. We regret now that he is not here. Dead only eighteen years he is almost forgotten. At least he was not imitative. He could flame, and, if the flame scorched us, at least he could flame. What other figure has counted in the republic?